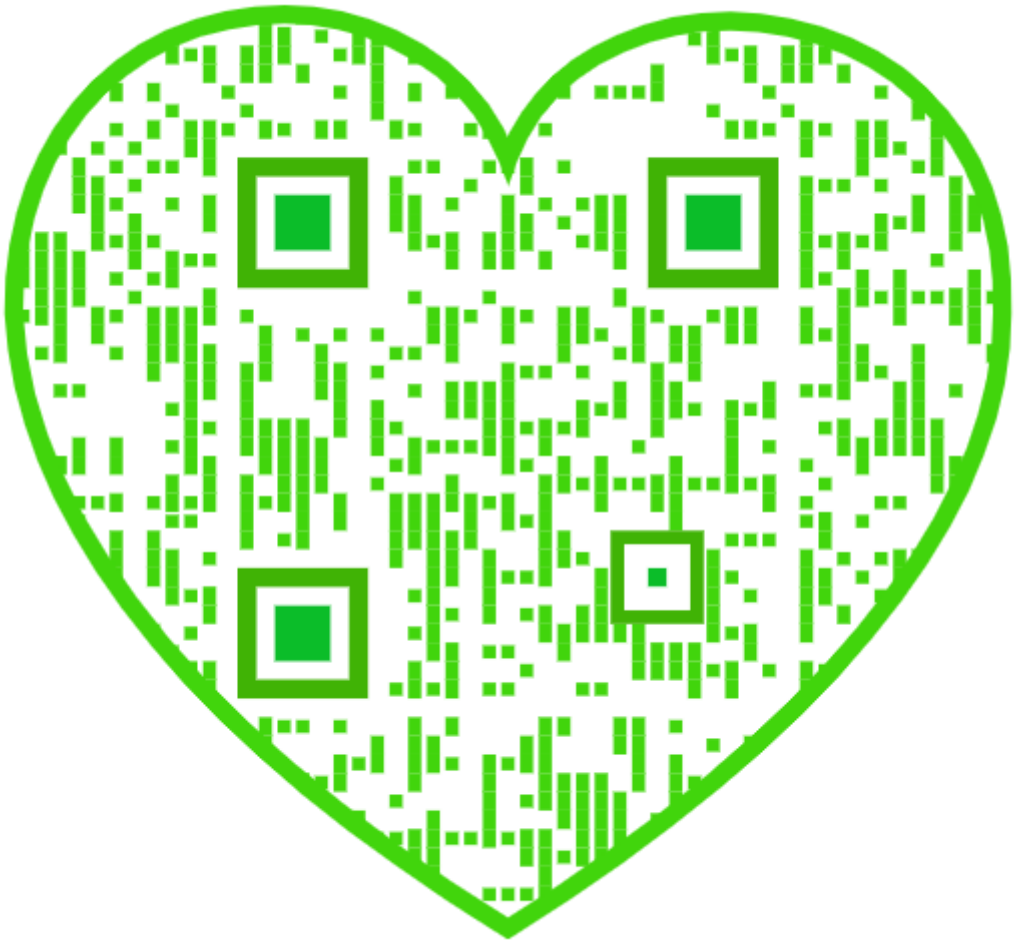

PENCIL SKETCHING

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PENCIL-SKETCHING

BY

GEORGE W. KOCH

ART DEPARTMENT - THE PRANG COMPANY

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INTRODUCTION

THE pencil is admittedly the universal medium for graphic expression. Even in the hands of the unskilled it offers a supplement and a clarification of mere words. A few lines roughly sketched on a pine board mean more to a workman than a detailed description, and a few telling lines skillfully sketched by an artist convey more meaning than pages of eloquent English. The use of the pencil is indeed universal. Its skillful use is all too rare. Every one depends in varying degrees upon the pencil as an aid to expression and every one desires a better mastery of it. Examples of pencil technique have already been published, but these examples have demanded the interpreter or teacher at the student's elbow. The purpose of this book is to take the teacher's place so far as may be in showing simple beginnings, progressive steps and a few excellent examples of finished pencil technique. It is designed for use in schools and for all individuals who are beginners in this interesting phase of art expression.

PENCIL SKETCHING

PENCIL technique has a charm of expression peculiar unto itself. By its strong power of suggestion it conveys definite impressions of color, texture, surface, atmosphere. With the pencil we may express a certain crispness and sparkle which seldom fail to attract. In using the pencil the constant search is for essentials and characteristics and for the elimination of details.

For these reasons the study and practice of pencil technique is particularly valuable; to sketch successfully with the pencil one must know definitely what one wishes to say and must be able to say it directly and with force.

An artist is impelled to make a sketch because of his desire to have a record of a certain object or scene. These sketches or records of impressions are the raw materials from which eventually he will create his pictorial or decorative compositions. A sketch, therefore, is a means to an end, and not the end. His chief aim in sketching, whether from landscape, figure, flower or animal, is to put down as simply and directly as possible such lines, shapes and tones as will best express the character of the subject. He is not then concerned about composition—the arrangement of lines, masses, etc.—that comes later. Nor is he concerned, especially, with careful drawing. Rather will he try for a spirited and suggestive rendering of the chief characteristics of the subject. To accomplish this, he will search out the main lines, draw together into telling masses that which is scattered and meaningless, and suppress all unnecessary and confusing detail.

MATERIALS

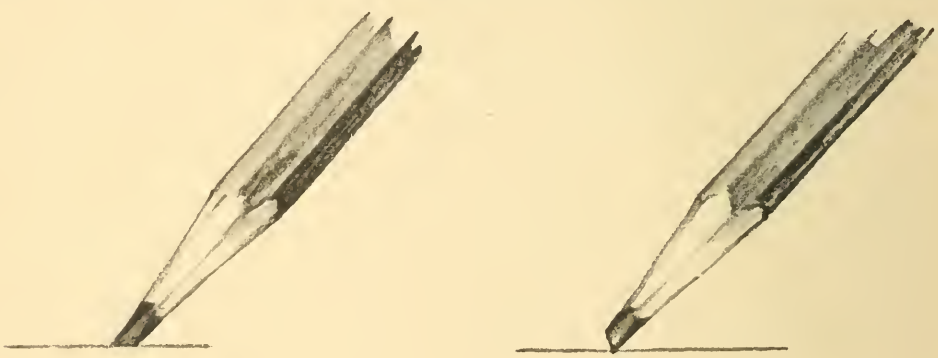
Of the various mediums available for sketching in black and white, the lead pencil undoubtedly is the favorite. Its advantages over other mediums are too well known to need mention here. There are many good makes of pencils on the market from which to select, but it is essential that the lead of a sketching pencil be smooth, firm and entirely free from grit. Scratchy pencils, as well as pencils that are too soft and

smudgy, should be avoided. It is well to have an assortment of at least three pencils of varying degrees of hardness—hard, medium and soft.

Almost any kind of paper will answer, providing it is not too thin and that the surface is fairly smooth; a rough paper will give the pencil work upon it a disagreeable, woolly appearance, which, as will be shown later, is no part of good pencil technique. The illustrations for this article were made on a French-Japan Vellum, which is an ivory-tinted paper with a surface admirably suited for pencil work. It is advisable to work over a number of sheets of paper in order to give a certain elasticity to the touch, which will be found advantageous in obtaining strokes of good quality.

To complete the outfit, a good eraser is necessary. "Faber's Kneaded Eraser" is recommended for the reason that it may be molded or kneaded into any desired shape.

A word may be said about sharpening the pencil. Except for indicating detail, such as small branches showing through a mass of foliage, the rigging on a sailboat, etc., it is best to use a blunt-pointed pencil, sharpened in the manner indicated in Fig. 1.



IN POSITION FOR BROAD STROKES

IN POSITION FOR SHARP, DECISIVE TOUCHES

FIG. 1

The pencil may be sharpened to a point, in the usual way, and then rubbed down on a piece of practice paper, until the strokes have the desired width. For sharp, decisive touches, the pencil needs only to be turned until the edge or point rests against the paper.

METHOD OF APPLYING THE PENCIL

Most mediums admit of being handled in several ways, and the pencil is no exception. It may be applied to the paper as one would apply charcoal; that is, scumbled on and rubbed together by means of a stomp or a piece of chamois. Sketches made in this manner have beautiful tonal qualities, but the method is slow and laborious, and is for that reason of little use in connection with nature sketching, where quick work is desired.

Another method, and that which will be considered here, may be termed the "direct" method, the aim being to attain by the intelligent use of pencil strokes, or markings, the desired result at once. The chief charm of this kind of pencil work is its crisp suggestiveness. This quality can only be attained by working with directness, and avoiding, as far as possible, "going over" the same place twice.

To accomplish this directness of result, it is essential, of course, that one should gain complete control over the pencil. One must be able to lay strokes vertically, horizontally or obliquely with equal facility. The hand must learn to adjust instantaneously the pressure on the pencil, so that the result may be any desired gradation from light to dark, or from dark to light, or a tone of the same value throughout. All this is a matter of practice.

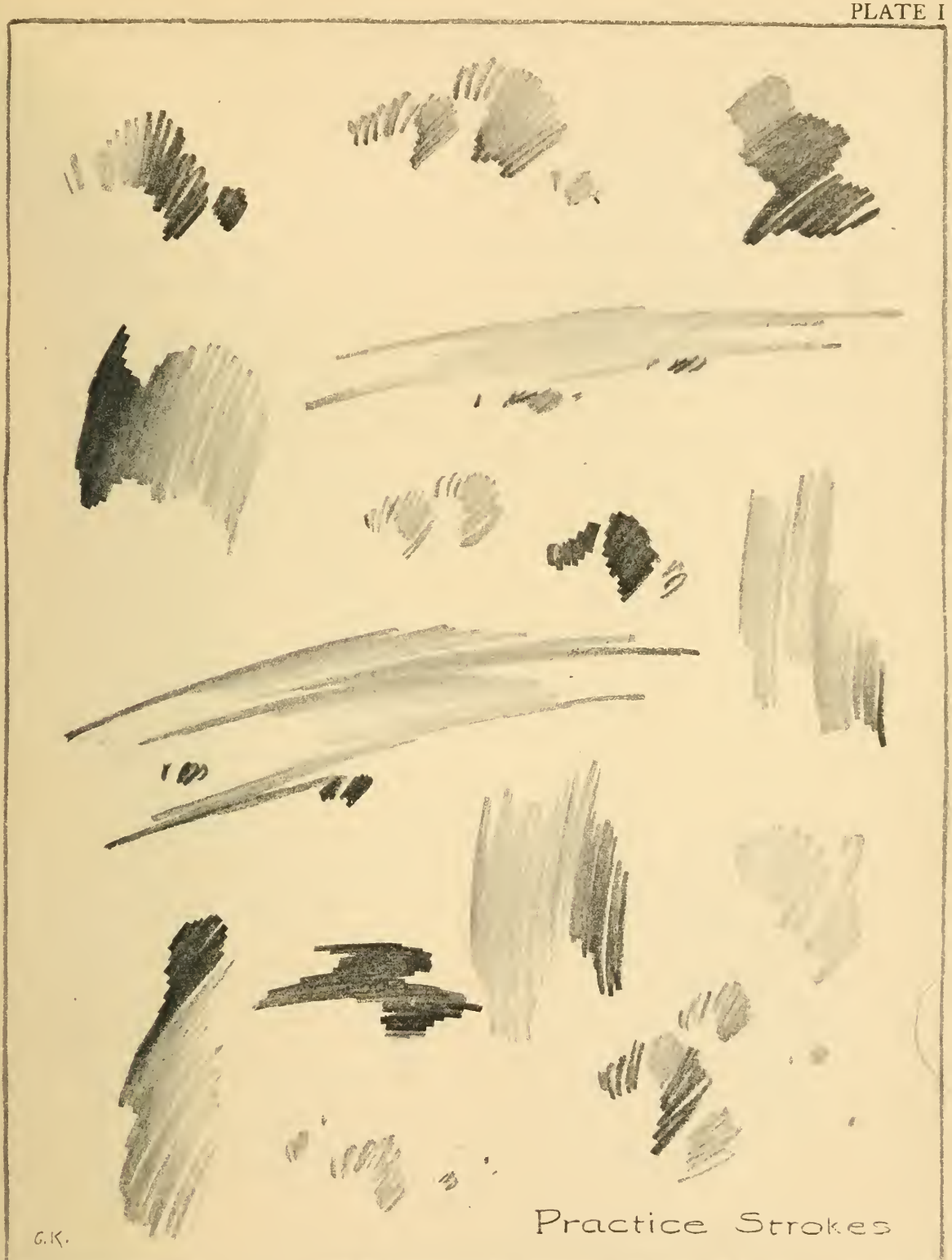
Those with but little experience in the use of the medium are advised to practice laying pencil strokes, following the suggestions given on Plate I. In doing this the aim should be to work with directness; the strokes should be made in a light and flowing manner, not laid mechanically side by side. The paper should remain in one position, the hand changing its position according to the direction in which the strokes are to be laid. In laying the strokes the pencil may be carried back and forth without being lifted from the paper (marking both ways), or it may be lifted at the end of each stroke and carried back without making a mark. Both ways should be practiced.

QUALITY OF PENCIL STROKES

It need hardly be said that light tones are rendered with a hard pencil, and dark tones with a soft pencil. It is possible, of course, to produce light tones with a very soft pencil, but the tones so made lack

quality; they have a dry, woolly appearance, whereas good pencil technique has a flowing, liquid quality, not unlike oil technique. Such a technique is indeed often referred to as "Pencil Painting." The woolliness results from a lack of evenness of tone, due to the fact that the surface of the paper has tiny elevations and depressions, and a soft pencil carried lightly over the paper covers the elevations but not the depressions; this gives an effect of black and white spots. It is evident that in order to overcome the difficulty, the pencil must be used with sufficient pressure to completely cover the paper, or, in other words, the surface of the paper must be "ironed out," as it were. If in doing this the resulting tone is darker than desired, a harder pencil should be substituted. A medium soft pencil will make a mark sufficiently dark for most purposes. Plates II and III are shown as examples of good and bad quality in pencil technique.

Before proceeding the student is advised to devote some time to the practice of laying strokes, paying special attention to their quality. In this practice both hard and soft pencils should be used and various papers may be tried until a surface has been found that is best suited to the purpose.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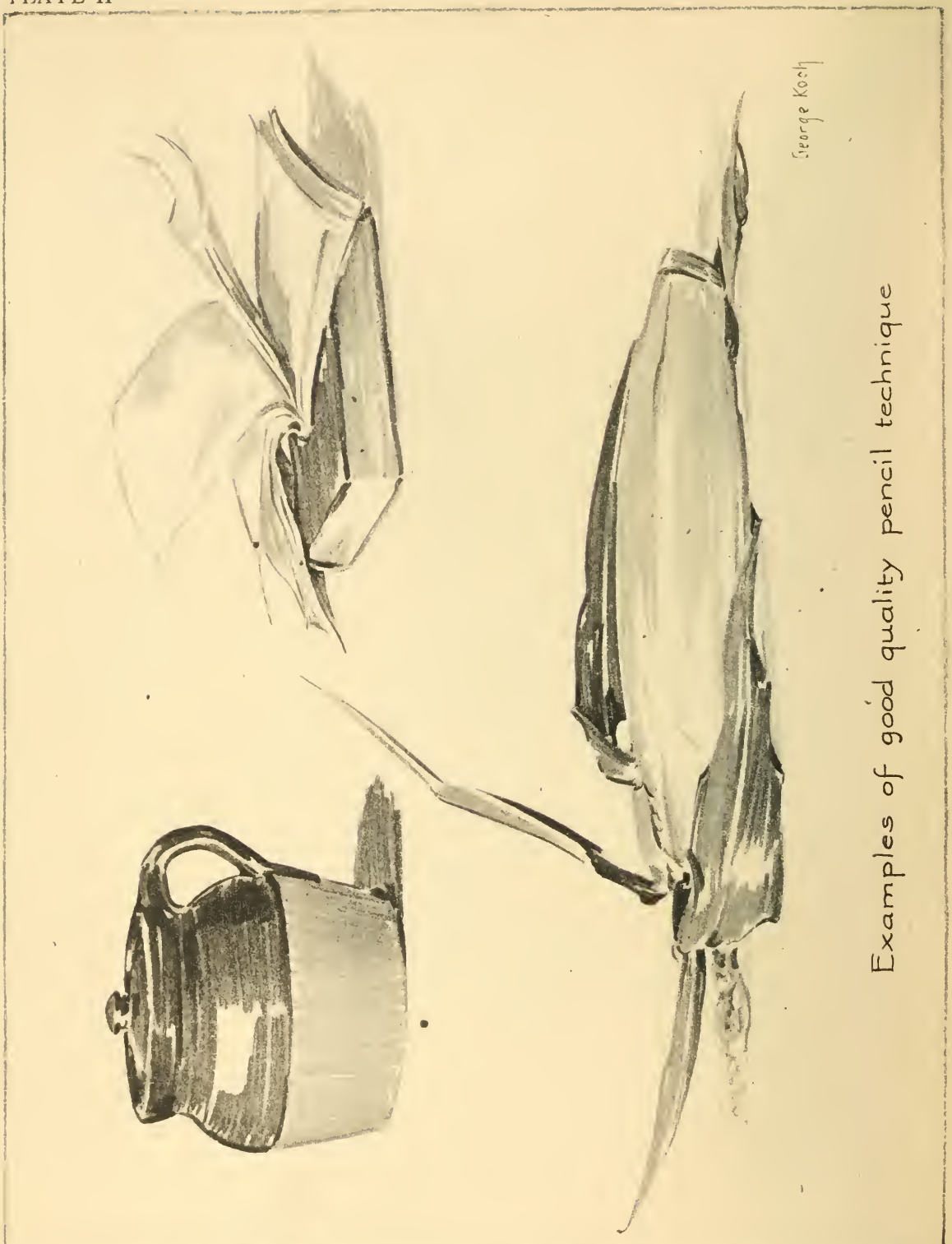
Practice Strokes



Examples of good quality pencil technique

Woolly Technique – resulting from the use of rough paper and pencils that are too soft

CHARACTERISTICS OF PENCIL TECHNIQUE

There are three things essential to successful sketching with the pencil, namely, *Direction* of strokes, *Character* of strokes and the *Manner of Grouping* the strokes. By the first means is expressed form or direction of planes; by the second and third means various surface qualities and textures are expressed.

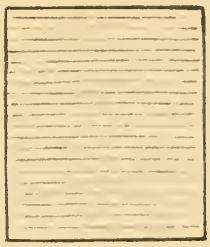
DIRECTION OF PENCIL STROKES

We have been taught the principles of perspective, and we are familiar with the fact that objects do not appear as they really are. We know, for instance, that in angular perspective, vertical edges appear vertical, while the horizontal edges appear to converge, slanting up or down as the case may be. We also know that the top and bottom edges of a Japanese lantern appear elliptical when foreshortened, and that the nearer edges of the ellipses curve upward or downward, accordingly as they are seen above or below the eye level.

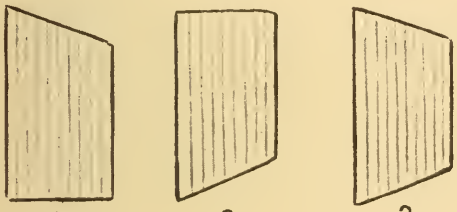
All this has a direct bearing on the subject in hand, as will be seen by referring to the diagrams shown in Plate IV. The light lines indicate the direction of the pencil strokes. In representing a vertical rectangular plane, the strokes may be laid vertically, as in A, or horizontally, as in B. Figures 1, 2 and 3 show the same face foreshortened; the vertical edges still appear vertical, but the receding edges converge. If in representing these foreshortened faces, the strokes are laid parallel with the vertical edges, their direction remains unchanged (A 1, 2, 3). If the strokes are laid parallel with the horizontal edges, their direction must change, according to their location above or below the eye level; that is, they must converge as do the edges of the face (B 1, 2, 3).

In representing a horizontal rectangular plane face, the strokes may be laid in the direction of one or the other set of its parallel edges. Here again the principles of perspective must be observed. The direction of the strokes is determined by the apparent direction of the chosen set of edges. If these edges are parallel, as in C, the strokes should be drawn parallel; if they are convergent, as in D, E and F, then the strokes must also converge. What is true of vertical and horizontal faces is also true of oblique faces.

A



B



1 2 3

Representing a vertical plane face with strokes laid in the direction of the vertical edges

1 2 3

Representing a vertical plane face with strokes laid in the direction of the horizontal edges

C

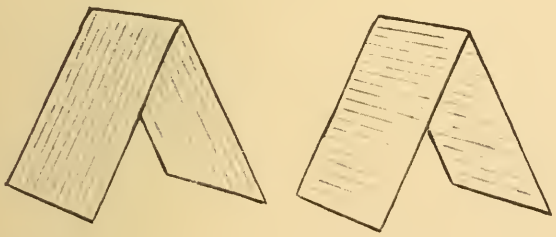
Representing a horizontal plane face with strokes laid in the direction of the parallel edges

D

E

F

Representing a horizontal plane face with strokes laid in the direction of the receding edges



Two ways of representing oblique faces

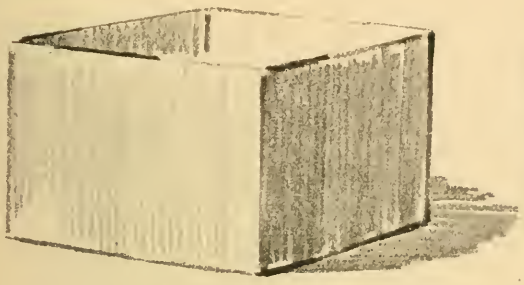
Diagrams - Lines indicate direction of pencil strokes

It will thus be seen that a fair knowledge of the fundamental principles of perspective is essential to success in pencil sketching.

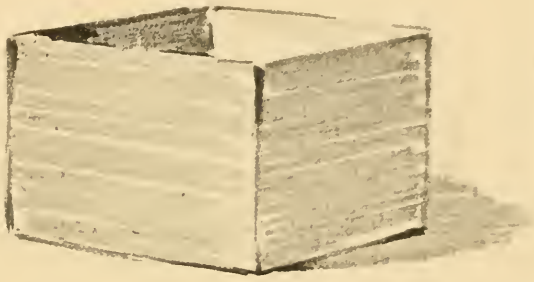
In Plate V are shown two sketches of the same box. In A the strokes are laid in the direction of the vertical edges, while in B they were laid in the direction of the horizontal edges. The question may be asked: "Which of the two is the more truthful rendering?" To this the answer would be: "It all depends." Broadly speaking, the direction of the strokes is determined by the direction of the planes, or the contour of the form. A vertical plane would naturally suggest vertical strokes; a horizontal plane would suggest horizontal strokes and an oblique plane oblique strokes. There are other things, however, such as surface appearance and surface texture, which may determine the direction of the strokes. This will be considered later.

Sketches C, D, E and F, Plate V, show a book in various positions. In C the cover, being a vertical plane face, was rendered with vertical strokes; in D the cover was expressed with strokes laid horizontally and running parallel (Fig. C, Plate IV); while in E and F the strokes converge as do the edges of the book (Figs. D and E, Plate IV).

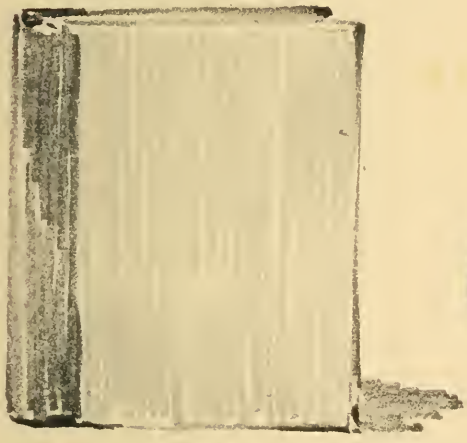
As an exercise, several sketches may be made of a strawberry basket in various positions, similar to those shown in Plate VI.



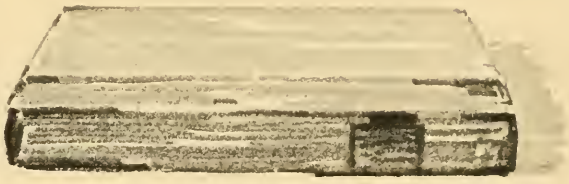
A



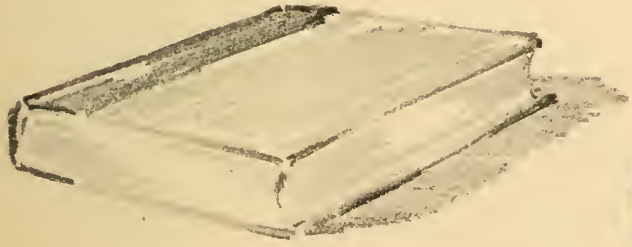
B



C



D



E

F

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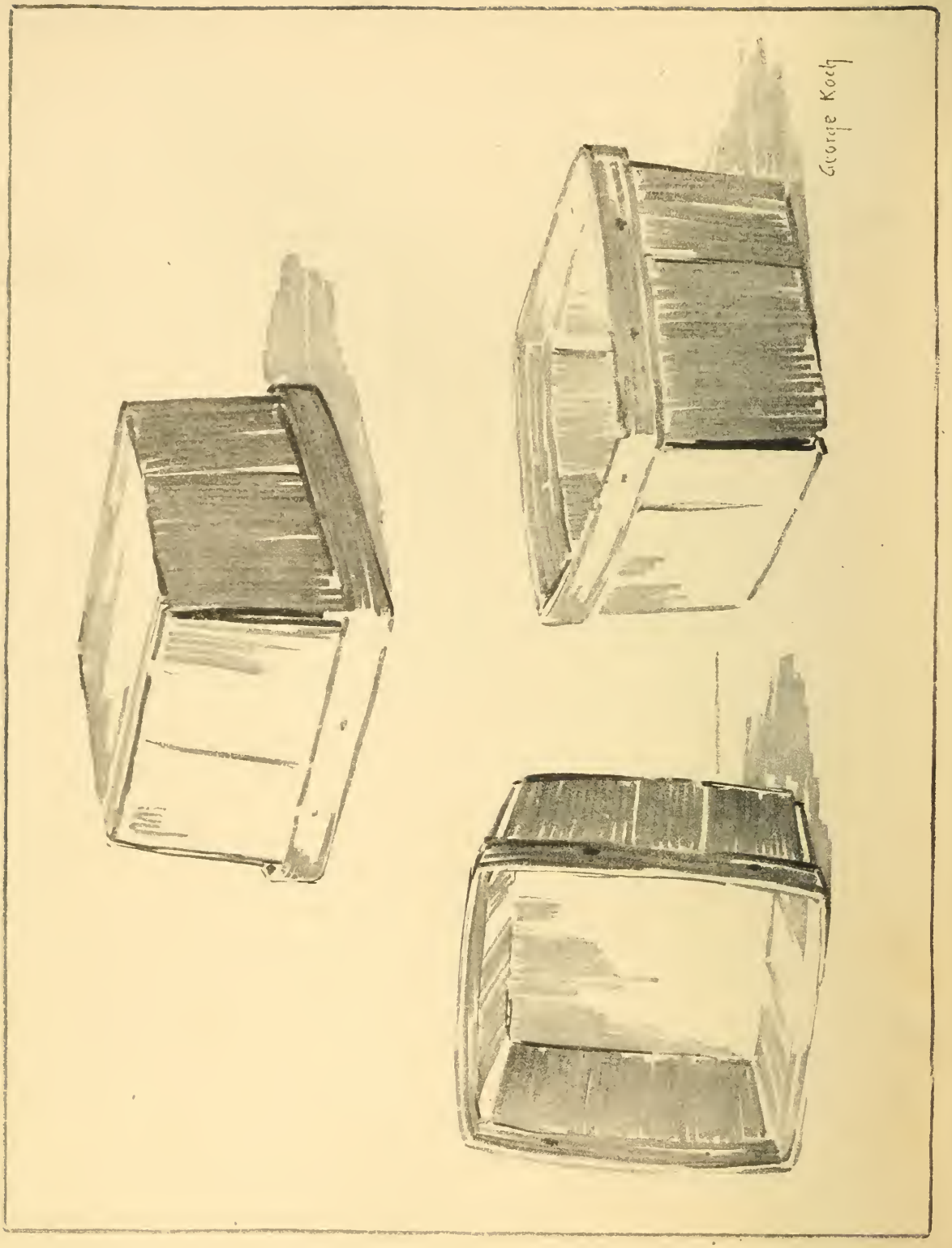
PLATE VI



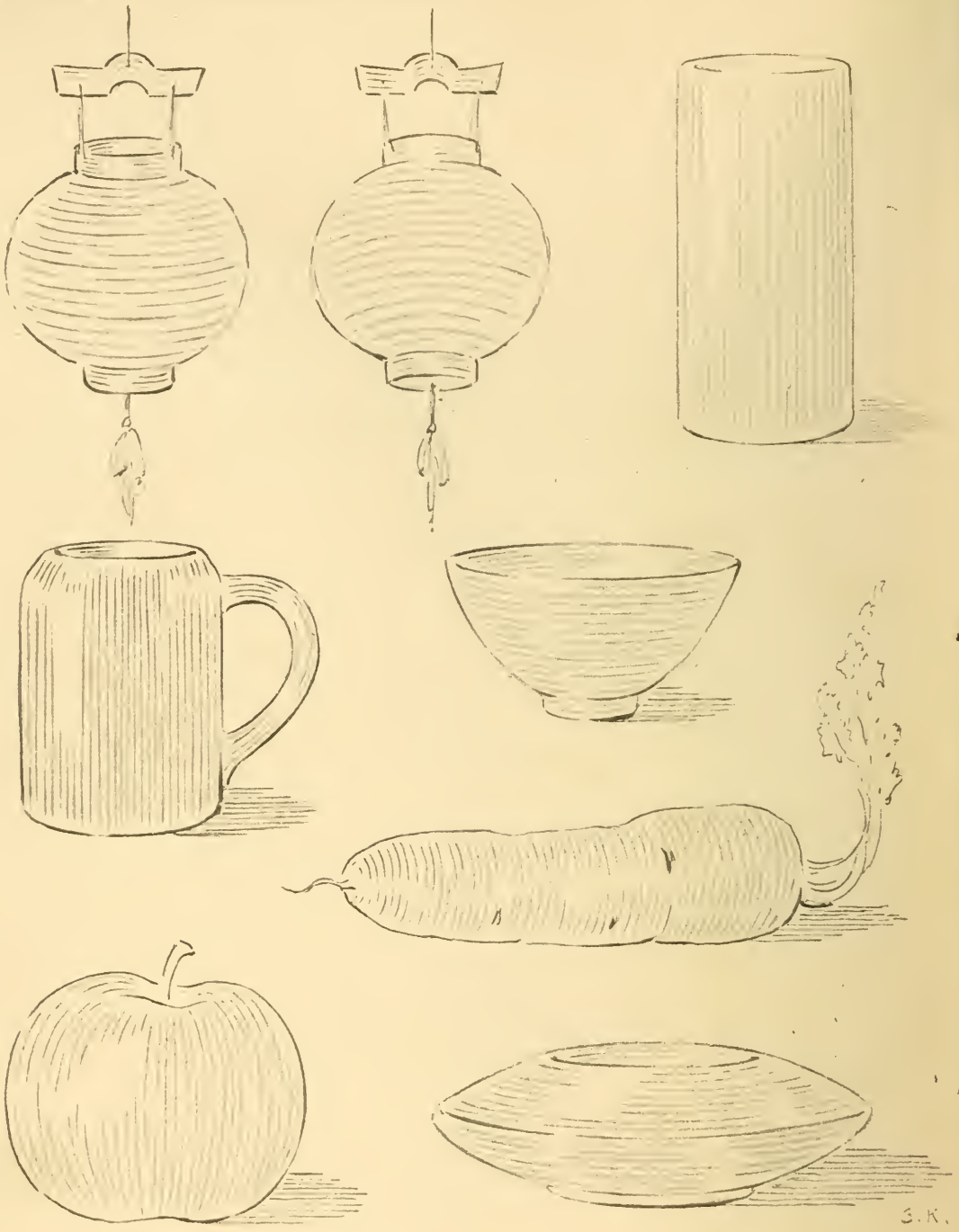
TREATMENT OF ROUND OBJECTS

The treatment of round objects is shown by a number of diagrams (Plate VII), the direction of the pencil strokes being indicated by lines. The strokes may be laid either vertically or horizontally, depending largely on the shape of the object. Objects that are low and broad may be rendered with strokes laid in a horizontal direction, while for tall objects vertical strokes may be used to better advantage. If the strokes are laid horizontally, they must follow the contour of the form; that is, they must curve with the form. If the object is seen below the eye level, as in the case of the Japanese lantern (A), for example, the strokes should curve downward, as do the nearer edges of the ellipses; if seen above the eye level, as in B, they would curve upward. Calling to mind our perspective principles on the appearance of foreshortened circles, we understand what determines the curvature of these strokes.

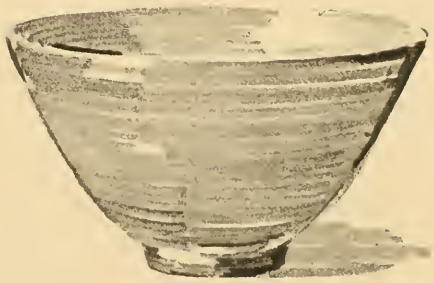
Upright cylindrical forms, such as the mug and the spill, Plate VII, may be treated in the way indicated, using vertical strokes and depending entirely on the light and shade to suggest roundness.

The apple is an example of another method of treatment. Although spherical in form, like the lantern, it was rendered with up and down strokes, curving outward more and more as they approach the contour, those at the center being practically straight. Plates VIII, IX and X (lower half) should be studied in connection with Plate VII.

The sketches of the vase, Plate X (lower half), and the chocolate pot (Plate XI) are examples of treatment of forms that are not straight up and down. In such cases up and down strokes may be used, curving more or less as may be necessary to express the form. The accompanying diagrams show clearly the direction and curvature of the pencil strokes.



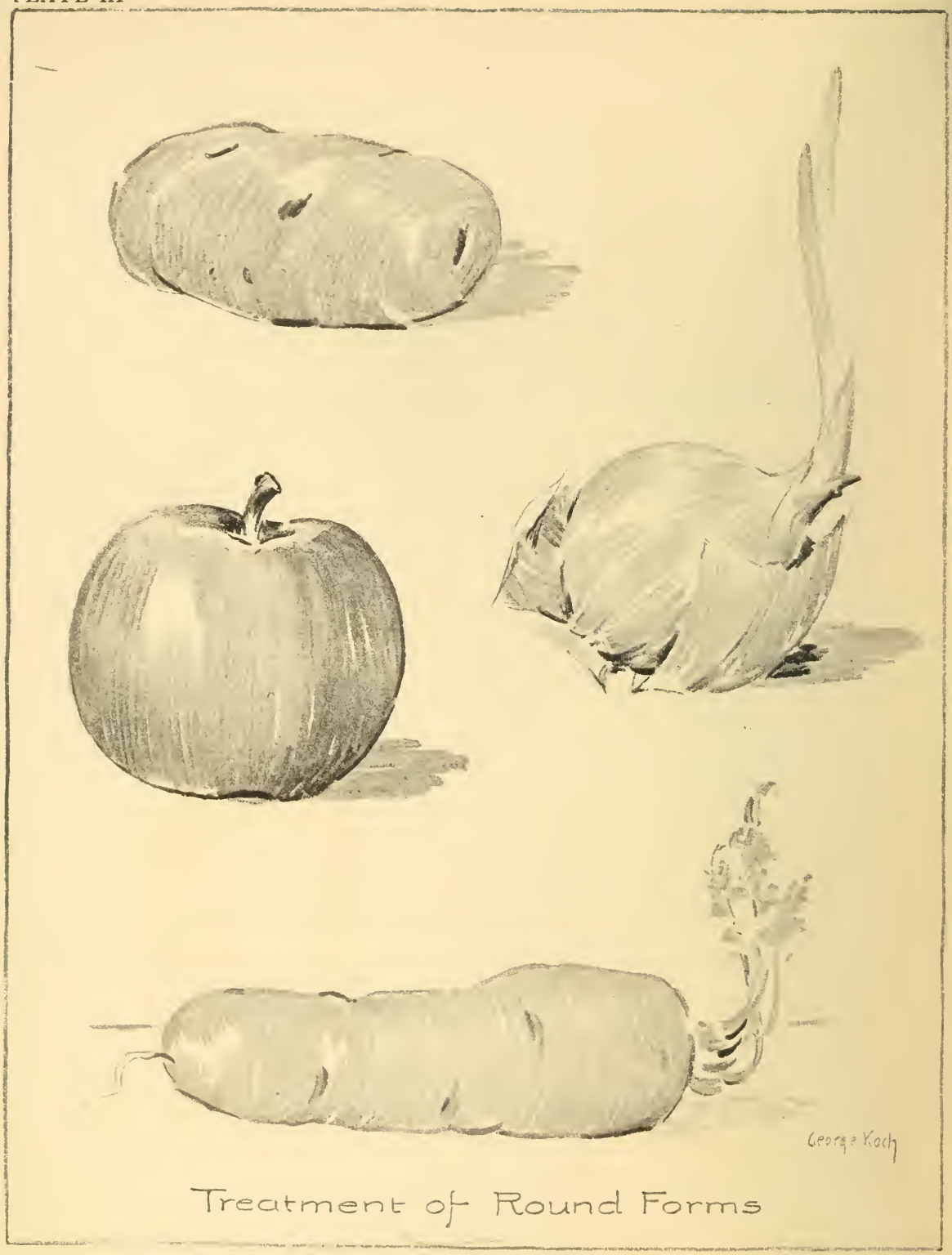
ROUND OBJECTS Diagrams showing Direction of Strokes



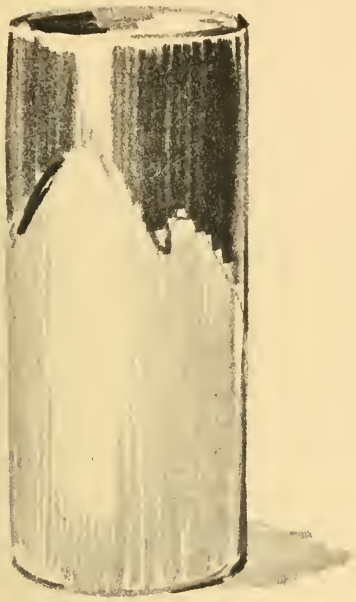
TREATMENT OF
ROUND FORMS

George Koch

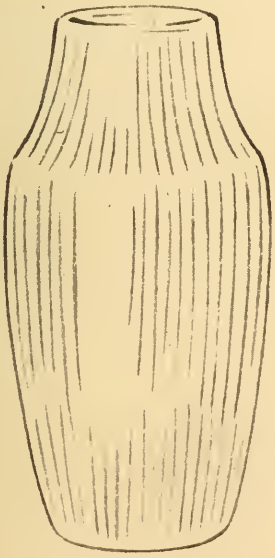
PLATE IX



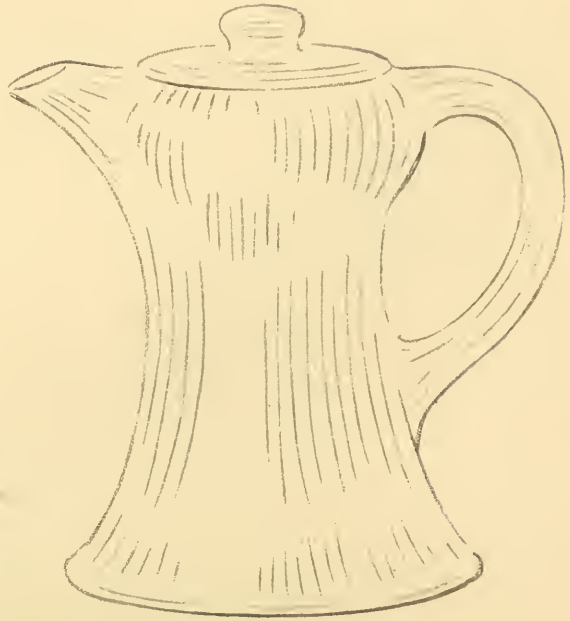
Treatment of Round Forms



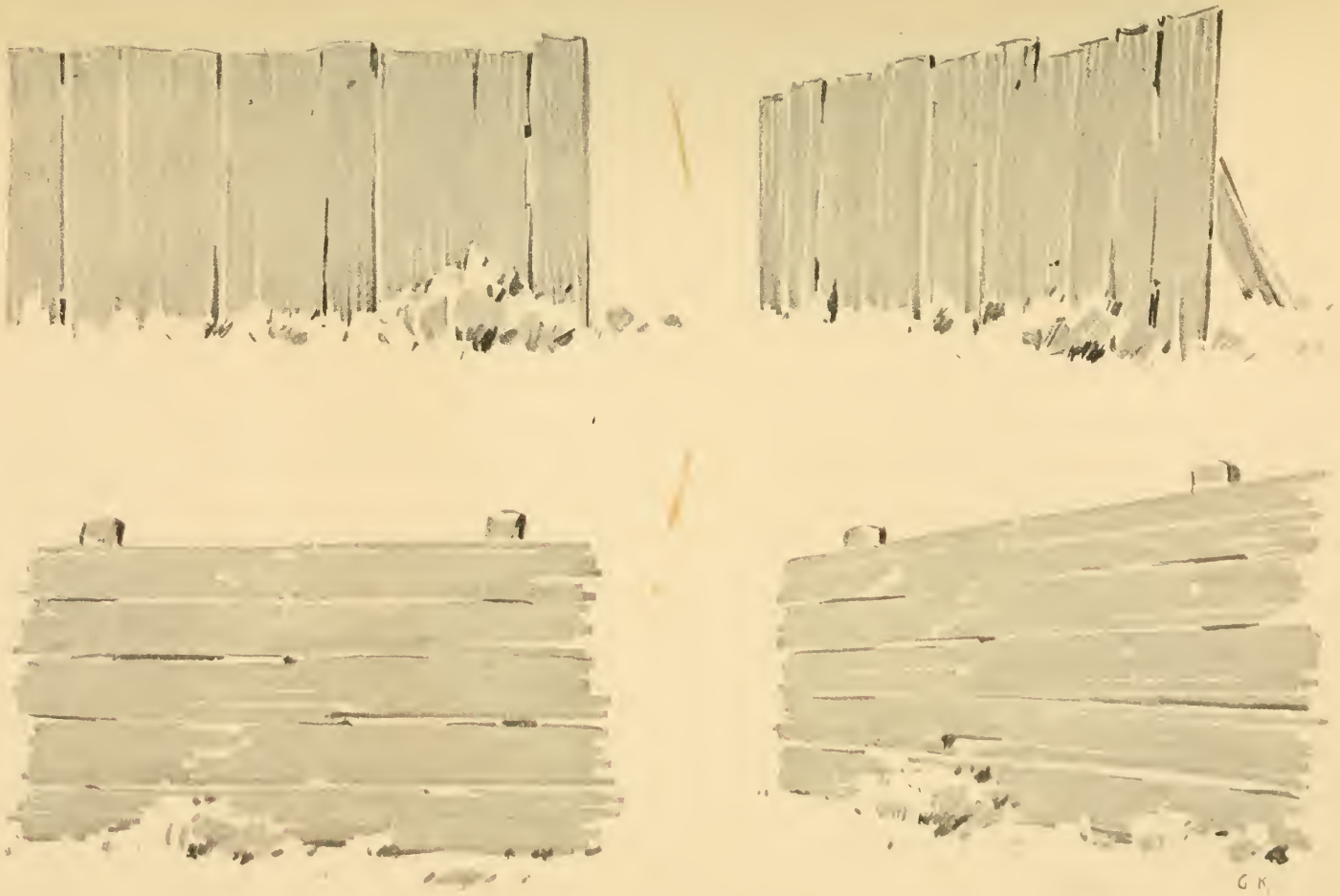
Treatment of forms that are straight up and down



Treatment of forms that are not straight up and down



Treatment of forms that are not straight up and down



Structural lines appearing on the surface may determine Direction of Strokes

PLATE XII

CHARACTER OR APPEARANCE OF SURFACE

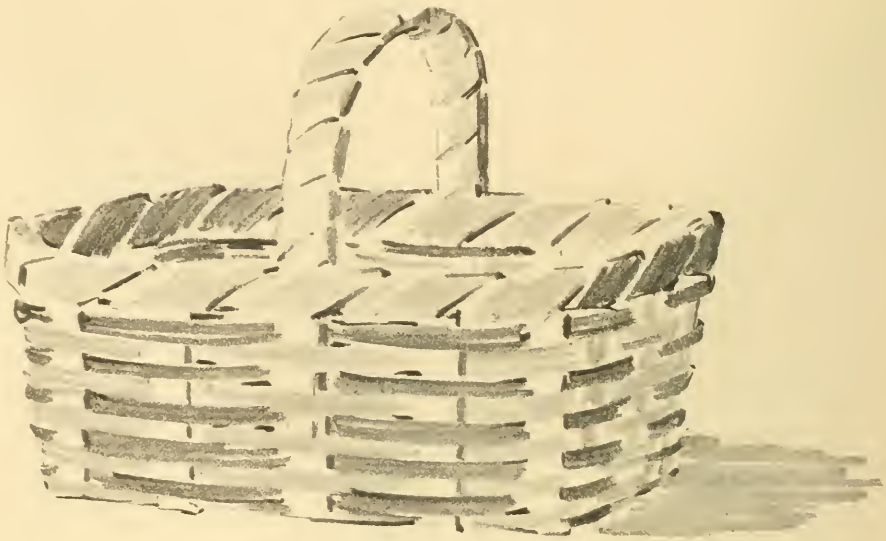
Up to this point the treatment of form alone has been considered, and nothing has been said about the rendering of surfaces. The character of surfaces, however, often plays an important part in determining the direction of the pencil strokes. For example, it becomes necessary, sometimes, to change the direction of the strokes in order to differentiate between the decoration on a piece of still life and its background or body color. Again, structural lines appearing on the surface may determine the direction of the strokes. An example of this kind is shown in Plate XII. A board fence with boards nailed up and down may be expressed with vertical strokes, while another with boards nailed horizontally would be rendered more truthfully with horizontal strokes. If the element of perspective enters, that is, if the same fences were seen foreshortened, vertical strokes would still be used in the first case, but in the second case the strokes would have to be laid following the apparent direction of the boards.

A similar example may be seen in the sketch of the building, Plate XIII. Here the ends of the buildings in the foreground had been covered with boards, nailed vertically in the upper portion and horizontally below. These surface characteristics were suggested by corresponding changes in the direction of the strokes.

The baskets shown in Plate XIV are also examples in which structural lines determined the direction of the strokes.

In Plate XV are shown three examples of the treatment of decorated pieces of still-life. As previously stated, it may be necessary at times to change the direction of the strokes in order to differentiate between decoration and background. In doing so, care must be exercised not to over-emphasize the decoration; it should not "stick out," but should appear to be a part of the surface.

The method of procedure in rendering decorated pieces of still-life depends somewhat on the character of the decoration. Generally, the background is "laid in" first, and the decoration added afterward. Sometimes this order may be reversed to advantage. In the sketch of the bowl, the background was laid in first; the light spots representing buds, blossoms and high-lights were left; the dark branches were suggested next, and the shape was given the buds and blossoms by outlining the



Structural lines appearing on the surface may determine Direction of Pencil Strokes

George Koch

Rendering of Decorated Surfaces

light spots. The spill was treated similarly. The background was laid in first, the paper being left to stand for the high-lights; then the decoration was added. In the case of the pitcher the bands were drawn first and the background was filled in last.

CHARACTER AND MANNER OF GROUPING OF PENCIL STROKES

Having considered *Direction* of pencil strokes it remains to speak of the *Character* of pencil strokes and the *Manner of Grouping* the strokes. While it was possible in speaking of direction of strokes to give certain definite rules which must be observed by all, what is to be said in regard to the second and third characteristics of pencil technique must be very general and rather in the nature of suggestion. It is at this point that the individuality of the student begins to play an important part in directing the movements of the pencil. Style or individuality of expression is a thing which cannot be taught or made subject to rules. It is rather the result of practice, observation and experience. It is this personal quality, this individual way of "seeing" and "doing" that exerts such influence in determining the character of the strokes. The manner in which the strokes are grouped also helps to express certain qualities. The student must now begin to learn from observation; must practice and experiment and solve for himself the problems of technique, ever new and varied, that come with each subject. Following this course he will guard against imitation or mere copying and his expression will be original, his technique his own.

A few suggestions may be made that will be of assistance:

Broadly speaking, the character or appearance of the surface of the object to be rendered, determines the character of the strokes as well as the manner in which they are grouped. The strokes may be long or short, dark or light, wide or narrow, etc., and again they may be laid so closely as to approximate a solid tone; or the paper may be allowed to show through and separate the strokes, according to the quality or texture it is desired to express.

The roughness of the tree trunk, the smoothness of a piece of glazed still-life or the surface of still water, the broken effect of a mass of foliage, etc., may all be suggested by these means. No absolute law can

be given, but a general rule may be observed: Long or continuous strokes laid rather closely suggest smoothness of surfaces, while short or broken strokes laid less closely suggest the opposite—roughness, or unevenness of surface.

The sketches on the following pages will serve to show the use of pencil strokes, various in character, and grouped to express various surface qualities and textures.

Next in importance to actual practice with the pencil comes the study of good examples. The student is advised, therefore, whenever opportunity affords, to study examples of good pencil work. Much may be gained in this way.

Whether sketching from figure, animal, flower, landscape or still-life, the technical problems are practically the same. The difficulties will be appreciably lessened if pieces of still-life are chosen as subjects for the first attempts at pencil rendering. Single pieces of interesting form, and preferably without decoration, should be selected. The object may be placed in a shadow box, as by that means the light and shade will appear very much simplified.

In beginning a pencil sketch the usual method of lightly indicating the main lines and masses should be followed, taking care to erase as little as possible. Much erasing will injure the surface of the paper and consequently the quality of the pencil work. The "blocking in" lines may be frankly left in; their presence rather adds to than detracts from the charm of the sketch.

Before starting work on the sketch, the subject should be carefully observed. If it is a piece of still life, study the form, the color, the arrangement of light and shade, the surface texture, and decide how these qualities may be best expressed. When these decisions are made, the work should be done with a certain intensity, for pencil work to be successful must be rendered at "fever heat"; there must be no flagging of interest while the sketch is in progress.

The aim should be to work simply and broadly; to express much with little by making every stroke tell, and to suggest rather than to actually draw. Directness is essential to good pencil technique; "going over" the work should be avoided as much as possible, as the sketch will lose its crispness and the quality will therefore suffer. Simplicity in "seeing" as well as in the "doing" is essential.

The values used should be few—most subjects may be rendered in two or three values. If the tone of the paper be allowed to stand for the lighter values snap and sparkle will be lent to the sketch. Special care should be taken in placing the darkest touches or accents; they should not be scattered meaninglessly, but should be carefully placed where they are needed to make the pencil work expressive.

TREATMENT OF BUILDINGS

A quaint old building and groups of fishing huts are the subjects of the following three sketches (Plates XVI, XVII and XVIII). Subjects of this kind are especially suited to pencil rendering and offer comparatively few difficulties to the beginner.

The method of procedure is the same as if sketching from still-life or other subjects. An interesting building found, the subject should be carefully studied before starting the sketch. Decide on the direction in which the strokes are to be laid for the various parts of the building—the roof, the sides, the chimney, etc. Draw, as it were, a mental picture first. This mental preparation is essential; it will facilitate the actual work on the sketch.

The building shown in the sketch (Plate XVI) had a shingled roof; the sides were covered with clapboards and the chimneys were of brick, blackened at the top by smoke. These surface characteristics were considered in determining the direction and character of the strokes. A point of special interest to the student should be the treatment of the sides of the building. For the shadow side the strokes were laid closely, with little of the paper showing through, while the light side is represented by the paper and a few touches of the pencil, merely enough to indicate the character of the surface.

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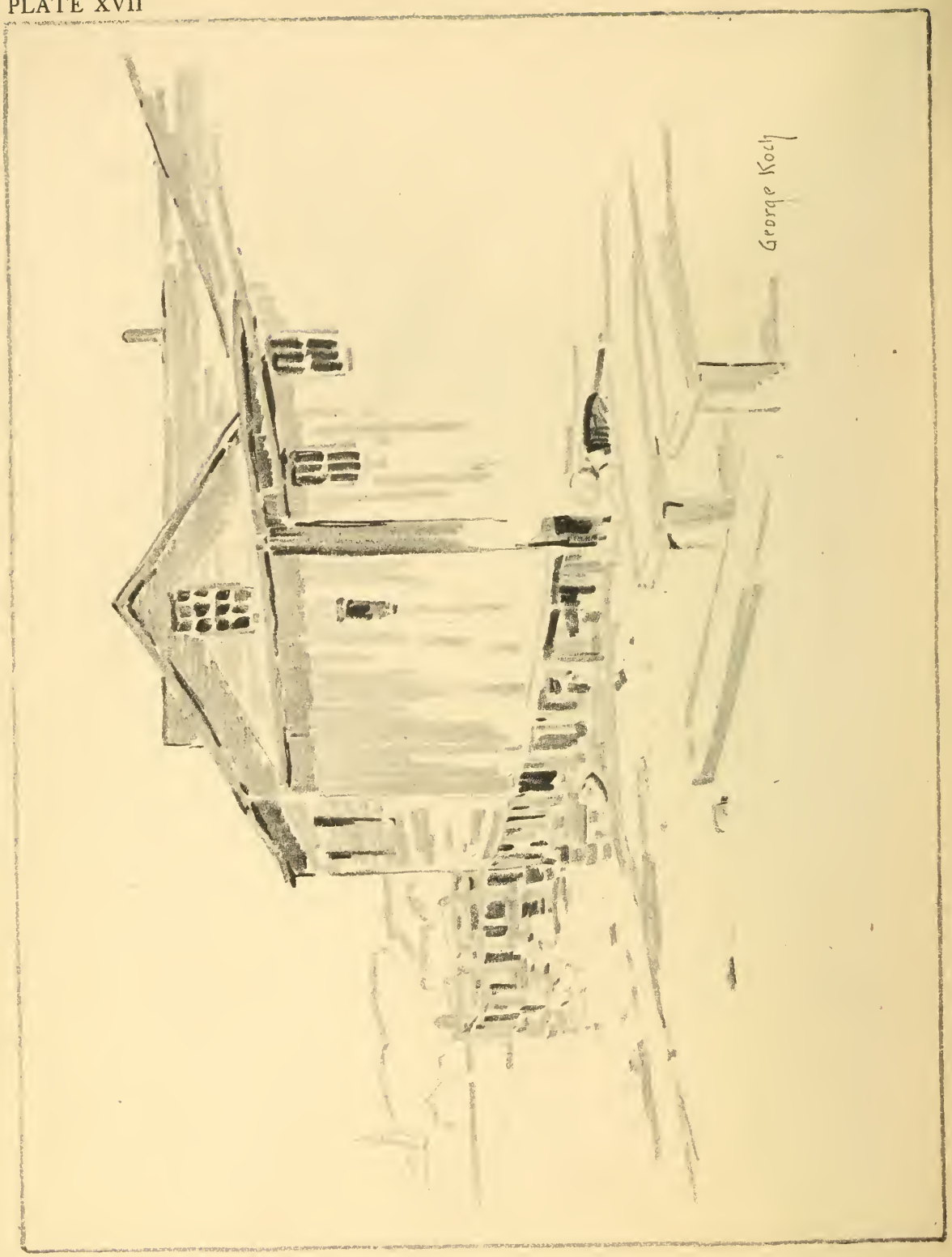
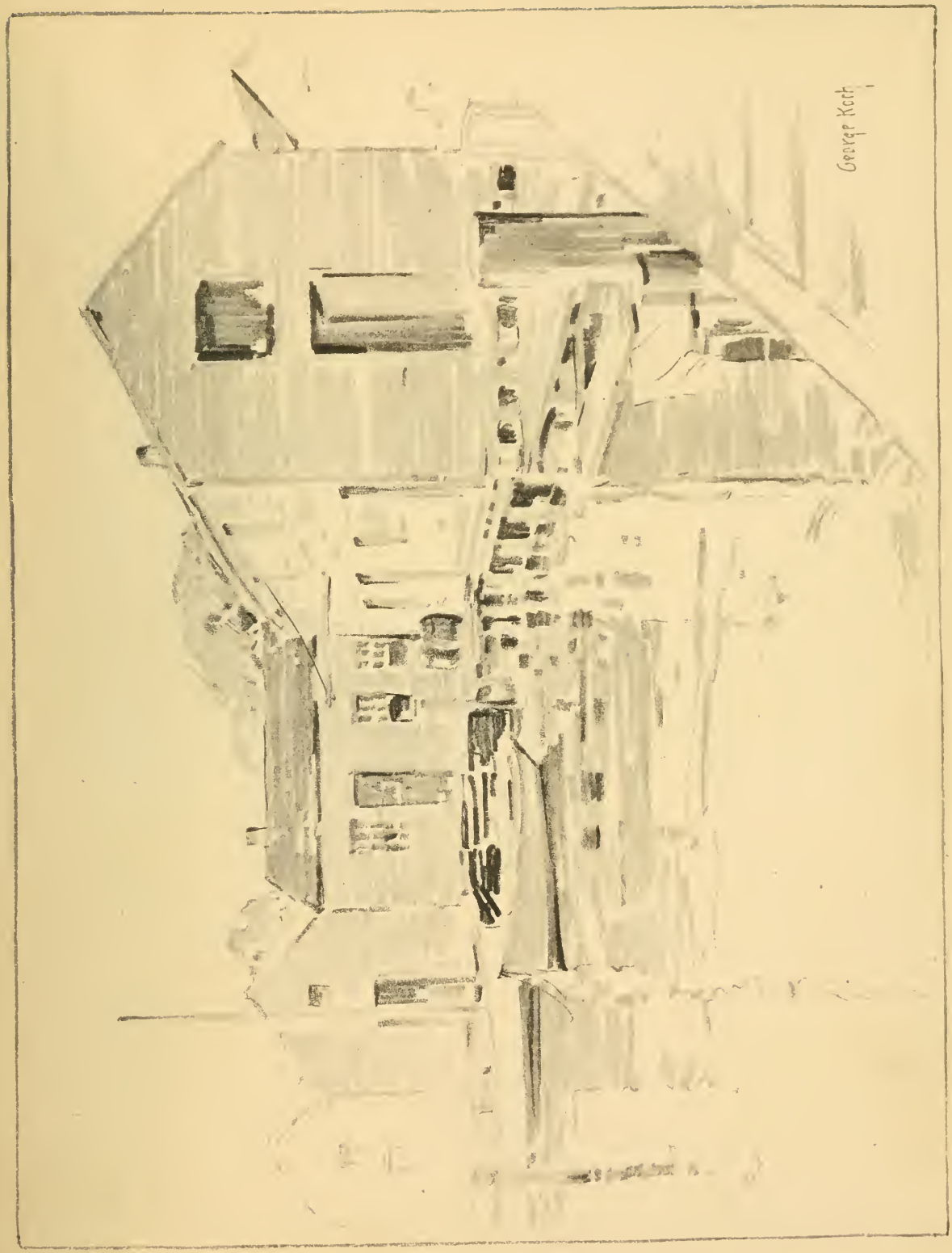
PLATE XVII




George Korb

SKETCH OF CHIMNEYS

It was said that the character or appearance of the surface may determine the direction as well as the character of the strokes. The appearance of the surfaces of the chimneys shown (Plate XIX) suggested the use of short strokes, laid to suggest the effect of brick construction, the white lines of the paper indicating the mortar between the bricks. This effect may be obtained by laying the strokes after the plan of brick-wall construction. This does not mean, however, that every single brick should be drawn. If this were done, the sketch would be hopelessly hard and uninteresting. A suggestive treatment should be used, drawing a little more carefully here and there (especially near the center of interest) and pulling together or omitting the rest. The aim should be to secure an artistic rendering, rather than a photographic reproduction.

George Koch

RENDERING OF FOLIAGE

In rendering foliage it is even more essential to work in a free and spirited manner, that the pencil work may suggest the qualities peculiar to foliage. A tree, especially if seen in the immediate foreground, is apt to appear very much cut up by small lights and shadows, and to *see* it simply is a difficult matter. Looking at the tree with eyes half closed, the arrangement of light and shadow will appear very much simplified. In this manner study the tree, its general outline against the sky, or other background, the disposition of the principal masses of light and shadow, etc. Then sketch in lightly the trunk and principal branches and indicate with a few touches the shape of the tree. This done, begin at the top and work down, laying the strokes in a "carefully careless" sort of manner. For the large and denser masses of foliage near the center of the tree, the strokes may be long and grouped quite closely, while nearer the edge, where the foliage is much thinner and broken up into small patches by the sky showing through, the pencil work must be correspondingly light and open—the strokes shorter and grouped less closely.

George Koch

PLATE XXI

HICKORY

Sketch of Elm

PLATE XXIII

Cocoa – Palm

George Koch

TREATMENT OF FLOWERS AND LEAVES

Flowers or a branch of leaves are excellent subjects for a pencil sketch. In this case, as always, the subject should be attentively studied before the sketch is begun. The value relation between flower, leaves and stem should be noted. If the flower is delicate and of a light value, it should be rendered with a fairly hard pencil. The delicacy of the flower may then be emphasized by using a softer pencil for the leaves, giving to them a much lower value. If the flowers are in clusters, as in the case of the lilac, the geranium or the elderberry shown in the sketch, Plate XXV, then the general outline of the cluster should be observed and the arrangement of light and shadow studied with the eyes half closed. The shape of the cluster may then be lightly indicated, the shadow laid in and a few touches added to suggest the character of the individual blossoms.

In the treatment of leaves both the shape of the leaf and the mode of veining must be considered; these determine the direction of the pencil strokes. If the leaves are long and narrow as a grass blade, a tulip leaf, or the leaf of the lily of the valley (Plate XXVI), the strokes are laid lengthwise; that is, parallel to the central vein, while leaves that are proportionately broader, such as the rose leaf, the lilac or elderberry leaves, are rendered more truthfully if the strokes are laid in the direction of the secondary veins; that is, branching out from the central vein after the fashion of a feather. The veining of the leaf is thus suggested by the light streaks showing between the pencil strokes. A suggestive outline around the leaf may be added to define its shape.

George Korn

PLATE XXVI

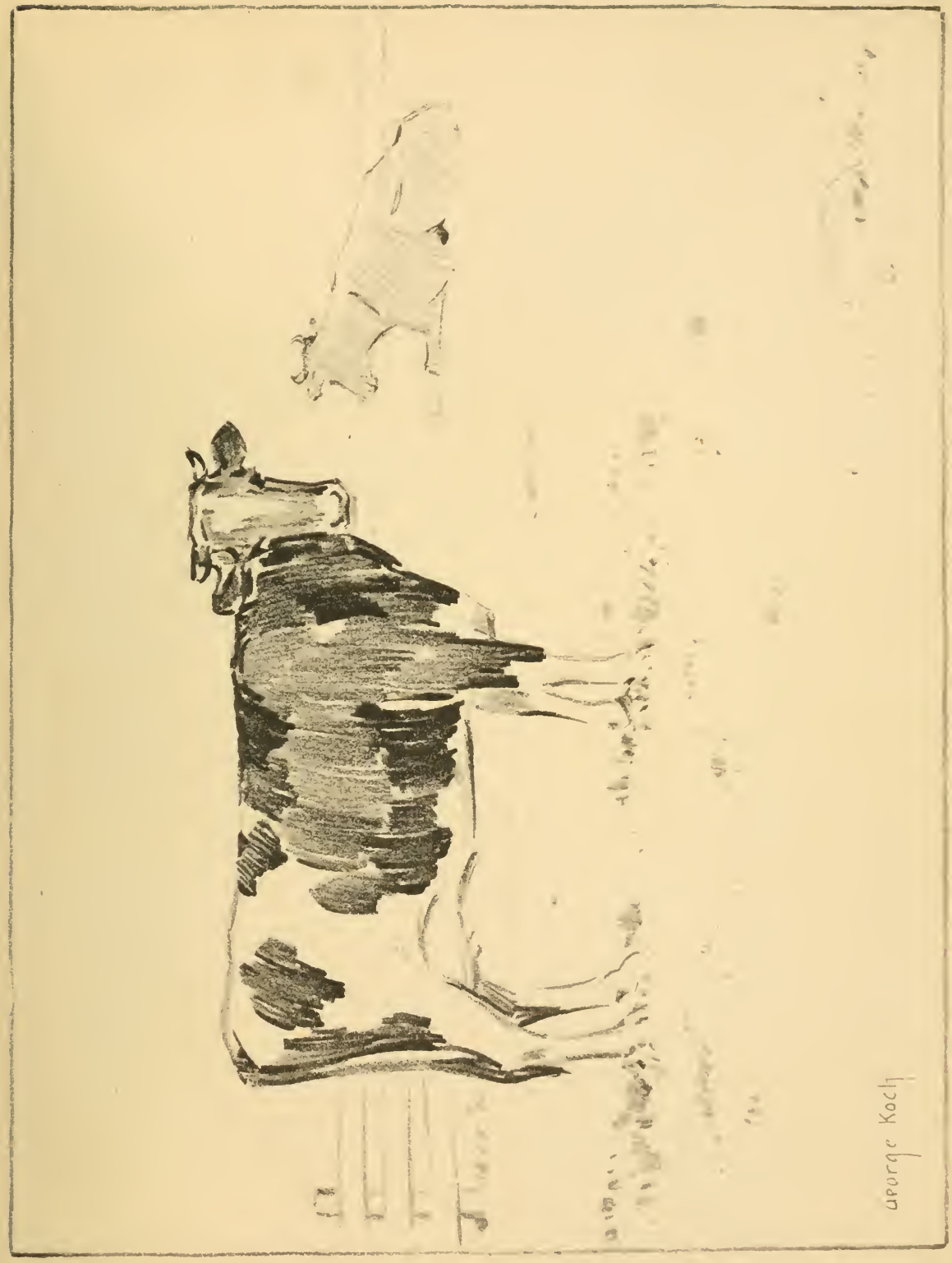
Study of Leaves
Blackberry
George Koch

SKETCHING FROM LIFE

ANIMAL

Obviously the pencil must be under fair control before sketches from the animal are attempted. An animal, even though it may be our pet dog or cat, has a way of changing its pose frequently, and at such times as it may see fit. Quite often it is necessary to do most of the work on the sketch from memory, and usually a number of failures precedes a successful sketch.

For the sake of practice, several sketches may be made from photographs of animals, providing these are good and of fair size. This practice should not be continued too long, however. Sketches made directly from life are apt to show more of real spirit. Technically, the problems are no different; the problems of still-life, the direction, the character and the manner of grouping the strokes being determined by the form, the color values and the appearance and texture of the surfaces.


George Koch

SKETCHING FROM LIFE

FIGURE

Sketching from the figure, while perhaps a little more difficult in some respects, does not, as far as technique is concerned, involve problems different from those already considered. Form, color values and surface characteristics must be studied as in still-life. These qualities are expressed by exactly the same means.

The treatment of face and hands should be simple; they may be effectively rendered with a sketchy or suggestive outline, and left white, save for a few touches indicating the features. For the hair, the strokes should be laid following the direction in which the hair lies. Curly hair suggests the use of curved strokes; long hair, brushed down smoothly, may be rendered with long swinging strokes laid rather closely. The rest of the figure, the dress, stockings, shoes, etc., should all be treated simply and broadly. The dress may show a multitude of folds, but only the most important of these should be indicated. Parts of dress that are light in value may be rendered with a sketchy outline and left white, except for a touch here and there to indicate folds or other detail. Unless the pattern in the dress or other part of the attire is large and pronounced, it is better to ignore it and think only of the general tone. Note the treatment of the blouse in the sketch of the boy reading, Plate XXX, also the rendering of the blouse on the little gardener, Plate XXXI. The blouse worn by the boy reading was made of a plain white material, but the little gardener's blouse showed a fine pattern. When viewing the figure with eyes half closed, the pattern disappeared, and only a light tone was felt, contrasting with the darker tone of the overalls. Therefore, in making the sketch, the pattern was ignored, the blouse was left white, and its shape defined with a sketchy outline. If, as in the case of the little boy's blouse, Plate XXIX, the pattern is conspicuous, it then becomes an important and characteristic element and must be considered. The stripes in this sketch were indicated with single strokes of a blunt-pointed pencil. If the garment is not white, but of a darker value, as in the sketch, Plate XXXII, for example, then the shape is filled in with strokes of the proper strength to give the required value. Dark touches indicating the shadows of the folds, and other accents, are generally placed last.

George Ruet

PLATE XXX

PLATE XXXII

George Koch

CONCLUSION

After having acquired, by dint of much practice and hard work, a certain proficiency in the handling of the pencil, the matter of technique should be made of secondary importance, for, in all artistic expression, technique is only a means to an end; namely, the thing to be expressed.